

October 24, 2016

Martinsville City Council toured the Westside area on October 24, 2016 beginning at 5:00pm. Those present for the tour were Council Member Teague, Mayor Turner, Council Member Stroud and Council Member Hodge. Vice Mayor Bowles was not in attendance. Staff present included City Manager Leon Towarnicki, Property Maintenance/Deputy Fire Marshall Andy Powers, Property Maintenance Inspector Mark Price, Officer Coretha Gravely and Assistant City Manager Wayne Knox. Ben Williams of the Martinsville Bulletin was also present for the tour. The tour traveled to a home on Sellers Street, to Memorial Boulevard where residents had issues on tire storage, to Fayette Street and onto Maple Wood Apartments. The tour also visited Pine Hall Road to address issues, Katherine Street to view a home that was being repaired, Swanson Street with discussion on a playground, Jackson Street, Peter Street where parking was an issue and then returned to the municipal building around 6:00pm

The Westside Neighborhood Meeting was held at Albert Harris Elementary School, 710 Smith Road, Martinsville, VA beginning at 7:30 PM, with Mayor Danny Turner presiding and Council Members present including: Council Member Teague, Vice Mayor Bowles, Council Member Stroud and Council Member Hodge. Vice Mayor Bowles was not in attendance. Staff present: City Manager Leon Towarnicki, Clerk of Council Karen Roberts, Assistant City Manager Wayne Knox, Police Sean Dunn, Officer Coretha Gravely, Inspector Andy Powers, and Inspector Mark Price.

Mayor Turner called the meeting to order.

Andy Powers summarized the property maintenance complaints and resolutions and then described locations visited by the neighborhood tour. Council Member Hodge asked if all complaints would be followed up on. Powers said all complaints, legitimate or otherwise are logged online for the property owner to check status. Council Member Stroud asked about the breakdown of complaints. Powers said most complaints were grass maintenance issues. He said the City code includes details of the property maintenance code. Resident complained about bulk trash not being picked up; City Manager Towarnicki explained that the bulk at that location was generated by the landlord. According to the City policy, the clean up when the landlord evicts tenants would be the property owner's responsibility.

Shirley Frazier, 1310 Cardinal Lane asked that a vacant home on Cardinal Lane be inspected. She said the door stays open and no one lives there, grass is not maintained and it looks bad on the other neighborhood properties. Officer Gravely said she has inquired about this home previously but it continues to be an eye sore. Ms Frazier also expressed concern about the new street lights. She says the lights are brighter but they do not light up all areas. She says saving money should not be as important as the safety of the residents. Frazier also stated that her utility bill increased \$190 in one month. Hodges asked if she had contacted the Electric Department about doing a usage audit of the home. Frazier said they checked the

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meter and told her the reading was correct. Council Member Teague asked her to contact the Electric Department and request an audit of the home and usage. City Manager Towarnicki explained the process that the Electric Department will go through when unusually high utility bills are reported.

Margaret Via, 203 Massey Street stated that her light bill was \$164 in September, in October it increased to over \$350. She called to have the Electric Department look into it but she has not heard back yet. Mayor Turner asked City Manager Towarnicki if it is possible that the old meters could have been reading wrong and the newly installed meters could be correct with higher readings. Towarnicki said that is a possibility, old water meters will read slower as the water meter ages. Hodges asked Towarnicki to do an analysis of the bills to see if the new meters could be the issue. Kathy Lawson said her utility bill also increased but she does not know if her meter has been replaced yet. Natalie Law, 1212 Roundabout Road said that her recent utility bill was over \$400. Turner said a study could be done to see if the electricity paid for by the City also went up. Towarnicki said it would be looked into and thanked those residents for reporting the issue.

Rev. Richardson asked if there is a written policy on absentee property owners maintaining vacant properties. He said here is a home on Peters Street near his church that is not being maintained. Andy Powers explained that when a complaint is received on a property, the property would typically be inspected by the next day. With the first notice, the owner is given a week to complete the maintenance. Grass can only be 10 inches high which is approximately 2 weeks growth. With the property maintenance timeline, the property owner might get away with only mowing the property once every three weeks. Powers stated that it is a \$225 minimum charge for the City to mow private property. Richardson says all homes on the side of the street opposite of the church are vacant but most are well maintained. Teague explained there is one property maintenance code which applies to residents and landlords. Hodge said it seems more like an enforcement problem and not a policy problem. Richardson also explained his church hosts a convocation event once a year. This year there were people working on the street during the entire week and causing traffic issues in that area. He asked if he would need to put something in writing to remind Public Works not to work on the streets in the area during that time.

Louise Niblett of Second Street expressed concern regarding the area behind her home that is overgrown; she also stated that her neighbor does not maintain their property causing roaches to come into her yard. Towarnicki said it would be looked into and the City would contact her.

Ms. Law also expressed concerned about a house on Fayette Street beside Divine Faith Holiness Church that is not being maintained.

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Mayor Turner commended Mr. Harris who was in attendance and who taught him in school. He also announced that the next Council meeting would be rescheduled due to Election Day.

Deloris Joyce, Yorkshire Road says she has complained about her neighbor not maintaining their property. Upgrades have been made but she suggests that they look at property on Wray Street also that is in worse condition.

Officer Gravely thanked everyone for attending.

Council member Hodge thanked residents for attending and stated she understood how uncomfortable it could be to express concerns.

Hodge and Towarnicki explained that the Neighborhood meetings are scheduled and announced at regular Council meetings months in advance and advertised on MGTv and on the City website and Facebook page. Hodge asked if notices could be sent to area churches. Towarnicki said we could look at churches in the area of the next meeting and establish communication the week before that meeting.

Willamena Harris, 1010 D Street thanked the City for cleaning up the voting district and said they did a great job.

Council Member Hodge made motion to adjourn the meeting; Council Member Teague seconded the motion with all Council Members in favor. The meeting adjourned at 8:26 pm.

Karen Roberts
Clerk of Council

Danny Turner
Mayor